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The Responsibility of Governing and the Changes in the Workers' Party of Brazil

Emil Albert Sobottka

This article analyzes the trajectory of the Workers' Party (*PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores*) in Brazil, emphasizing the three points in time that most marked its history: its origin and initial proposals as an ideological oriented socialist party, the changes that occurred when it began to administrate several medium-sized and large cities and implanted the Participatory Budget (*Orçamento Participativo*), and finally, its victory in the presidential elections and the main lines of the policy implemented.

Key words: Workers' party, political parties, participation, democracy, Brazil

The Workers' Party (PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores) is currently the subject of discussions in the everyday world of politics and also in the academic world. Established in 1980, in the wake of the movements for union renewal, resistance to the military regime and redemocratization of Brazil, for years it had radical proposals and political practice as its distinctive mark. Initially it participated in the elections rather to polarize public discussion on social conflicts than to come to office. Over time it took on the responsibility of being the government in several cities and began to be known for its local government practices – with the implementation of the Participatory Budget, the prioritization of policies for the lower income population, and advocating a radical democracy. The wide dissemination of these practices, the World Social Forum that was held in Porto Alegre, a showcase of the PT administration, and the election of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva as president of Brazil in

2002, gave many militants and sympathizers the hope that a different world from that dominated by neoliberal capitalism could be possible. But it was a fragile hope, permeated by voluntarism which underestimated the breadth of concessions made by the PT in seeking to maximize votes to conquer power.

This text will present a brief reconstruction of this trajectory of the PT, emphasizing the three points in time that most marked its history: its origin and initial proposals, the changes that occurred when it began to administrate several medium-sized and large cities, and finally, victory in the presidential elections and the main lines of the policy implemented.

The Workers' Party (PT) has been a subject of study practically ever since it was founded, and the literature about it can broadly be divided into the same three periods. The initial studies focused on the circumstances that favored its founding (Oliveira 1988), the initial project that would distinguish it from the other parties (Meneguello 1989; Keck 1991; César 2002), individual trajectories (Harnecker 1994) and militancy (Gaglietti 2003). The *specificity* of the PT was the strong point of that time. In the 1990s, the literature on the PT began to concern itself with the challenge of being a local government (Bittar 1992; Jacobi 1994; Couto 1995), the success and failure of the PT administrations (Simões 1992), the Participatory Budget (Dias 2002; Santos 2002), and the proposal for democracy. A more critical literature points at the risks of changing the characteristics of the original ideology, the conflict between administrations and the party rank and file, changes and incongruities in party strategy (Leal 2005). It is also seen that the PT leaders and even the voters are increasingly recruited from the middle class (César 2002), leaving aside the original base. Professionalized militants and institutionalization are equally pointed out as harmful to the original party project (Novaes 1993). In recent years the studies have focused mainly on the recent changes in the PT, related to the 2002 presidential elections and the administration of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (Samuels 2004). This more recent literature has predominantly a political science perspective, with a lack of analyses focusing on the PT trajectory based on its relationship with social movements and the original utopia of a more just society.

The project of a democratic socialism

The Workers' Party (PT) was founded by intellectuals and activists of classical and new social movements. The military dictatorship that governed the country from 1964 to 1985 had been weakened at the end of the 1970s and had begun a process of gradual, controlled distension. The economy that, at the beginning of that decade had undergone a very strong expansion, had suffered the impact of the two oil crises. The political alliances that had provided support to the military regime slowly broke down, and both the middle urban sectors and part of the entrepreneurship began to openly criticize the military government. Internally there were divisions that were expressed in the dispute for the presidency of the Republic in the Electoral College by two generals. In various sectors of the economy, strikes began to break out, the main one being that of the metallurgical workers in 1978, led by Lula and supported, among others, by the local hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

The two-party regime implemented by decree by the military was gradually getting out of control, the opposition was gaining more votes, attaining 60% in the legislative elections of 1978. The pressure for direct mayoral elections in large cities, for state governorship and for the Presidency of the Republic was also growing.¹ In 1979 an amnesty of political crimes practiced for political reasons was proclaimed, both for the military and their helpers and for the opposition, which enabled exiled or persecuted politicians to return. Two-party politics was revoked, creating the possibility of forming new political parties.

Three social segments, basically, came together to form the PT: the new labor unionism, new social movements connected to the Roman Catholic Church and intellectuals from the classical left.

The Brazilian unions were historically connected to the Ministry of Labor. During the military regime, this connection took on the more explicit form of

¹ In 1982, the first elections for governor and mayor took place in the capitals and large cities. The campaign in favor of direct presidential elections resulted in one of the greatest mobilizations ever seen in Brazil in 1984 (campaign for Direct Elections Now ["Diretas Já"]), but an agreement of the elite with the opposition put off the elections to 1989, when the PT made it to the second round of the elections with Lula.

control and fostering conforming leaders. The lack of synchrony between growth and modernization of several segments of industry and the conditions of the workers motivated the fighting spirit of some union leaders. They began mobilizations among the workers, at the workplace itself, seeking to inform them about their situation and their rights, challenging the prevailing order. The line of confrontation which gave them the name of "authentic" as opposed to the conformists, "*pelegos*" ("yellows") gained publicity, especially with the strikes in the more developed sectors, such as the metallurgical one. At that time it became clear to these unionists that they needed to find an adequate political representation. After assessing the already existing alternatives, they chose to establish their own party (Oliveira 1988).

The Roman Catholic Church, that had initially supported the military coup from 1964, soon distanced itself from it, and not only began to criticize it, but also to shelter people and groups that had no other spaces in which to articulate. The new theology that had emerged from the Vatican Council II, and especially from the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellin, led to pastoral work that unified popular religiosity, political criticism and commitment in the urban peripheries and in rural regions. The clearest expressions of this renewal were the Ecclesial Base Communities (Comunidades Eclesiais de Base) and the different kinds of pastoral work (ecclesial ministries specialized in issues such as health, land, workers, youth, and others). The theological-political discussion about everyday issues, which used a methodology called *seeing, judging and acting*, created favorable conditions for the rise of advocacy movements. The ownership of urban lands, housing, public transport, living conditions in the neighborhood and at work, public services, the unbridled price rises, besides issues such as respect for human rights, led to a great number of new social movements (Jacobi 1987).

In these movements a critical view of capitalism was developing, a great sensitivity towards injustice, and the will to build a better world. Slowly national thematic organizations were formed as well as an articulation with the union oppositions. These groups considered themselves a people's movement, valued their autonomy and were determined to construct their own history. Together with the Church, other bodies, such as the Brazilian Press Association (Associação Brasileira de Imprensa) and the Brazilian Bar Associa-

tion (Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil) supported these movements. The solidarity of these movements was essential for the striking metallurgical workers in 1978, and the confidence generated there made it easier for the new social movements to join the articulations of the “authentic” union workers in favor of forming their own party. In a recent interview, Francisco de Oliveira (2006) says: “The contribution of ecclesial base communities to form the PT was extraordinary. It was this that led to forming a sense of ethics in the PT that is rare in the Brazilian parties”.

Very close to these movements there was still a reasonable number of intellectuals that were highly involved and committed to some causes, but acted independently, such as Paulo Freire, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Moacir Gadotti, Francisco de Oliveira, Herbert de Sousa (Betinho). They were part of the social base of the PT, sometimes as members, sometimes as sympathizers. Considering the characteristics of their individual joining and their action, they can hardly be treated as a single segment. The rural movements were in the beginning almost absent; they became part of the PT gradually, until they formed a very important base.

The third segment that helped form the PT, the classical, Marxist-oriented left, was numerically small and subdivided into many and diversified groups, generally well-disciplined. They were dissidents from the Communist party, radical Christians and Trotskyists, mostly intellectuals or leaders, who felt disillusioned, and therefore abandoned their unions, churches, universities and similar organizations, where they were part of strongly articulated groups. Some of them had even taken up arms against the dictatorship. Many were disillusioned as to the strategy of a prolonged war with a rural base to implement socialism and found in the proletariat a possible subject of social transformation.

Discussions around creating a party of workers and its connection or not with members of the parliamentary opposition, the socialist and class orientation went on for two years and occurred basically in the union environment. The basic documents of this period were the Letter of Principles and the Po-

litical Platform, launched on May 1, 1979.² In that letter a class party “without bosses” was advocated, whose ultimate objective was to overcome capitalism and the transition to socialism, besides focusing on the issue of democratic liberties, living and working conditions and that particular moment of national life. The party that was finally created had to build its internal unity, a common interpretation of reality and aims that could be shared. The three main social segments that constituted it had their own strong traditions and idiosyncrasies – the unionists with their class vision, the left wing Christians who were disillusioned with politics and the left wing militants with their centralist concept of discipline – which constituted a challenge for unity. According to Samuels (1997):

Brazil has always had leftwing parties: what is new about the PT in Brazilian politics – in which even these parties were formed from top down – was not their leftism, but the fact that it was organized from bottom up. Workers’ unions and social movements which, in the 1970s were in opposition to the authoritarian government, constituted the bases that formed the PT. The great difference between the PT and the leftwing parties of its time and the political history of the country, in general, also supported by the unions, is that its rank and file were major resources and had an active role in the planning, institutionalization and decision-making process of the party.

Thus Brazil began to have a programmatic party, an advocate of the system’s democratization and structural reforms such as income redistribution, strengthening of the national companies, land reform, expanding social rights both of the workers and of the population on the urban peripheries, radical changes in the economy such as breaking with the IMF, nationalization of banks and non-payment of the foreign debts, besides handing the means of production over to the State. The project of democratic socialism was never detailed by the party, but by proposing it, the PT innovated, breaking a perverse relationship that had been historically constituted in Brazil between authoritarianism and the advocacy of social rights. The PT proposed to unify

² Save indication to the contrary, the documents of the PT until 1998 are quoted from the collection of texts *Resoluções de encontros e congressos, 1979-1998* (PT 1998), and the later ones from www.pt.org.br (consulted between Dec 10, 2005 and Apr 2006).

the struggle for democracy and for the social rights of citizenship, even, according to Moreira (2000), at the price of “reneging the legacy of the preceding left and accepting a democratic socialism within the standards of capitalism, but with income redistribution”.

The PT between ideology and pragmatism

Before reconstructing the second moment of the PT’s trajectory, when it came into office in several local governments, three moments of its political action should be mentioned. They express the tension experienced internally between the programmatic-ideological option prevalent in the beginning, and a more pragmatic insertion in the political and electoral game that would gradually prevail.

At its electoral première, in 1982, the official discourse of the PT was that “workers vote for workers”. The conditions were adverse, since the military regime had, in a case by case system, linked the vote, obliging the voter to vote all the way from city councilman to governor for candidates from a same party, and eliminated the party acronym from the paper ballot. The policy of not making alliances resulted in isolation and a wearing defeat when the expectation of having most people join did not prove right. A greater impact than obtaining only 3.5% of the valid votes on the national level and electing only two mayors came from the fact that less votes than the number of party members were obtained in six states (Voigt 1990). Even within unionism, the dispute with the Communists and other organizations became more aggressive. A major internal consequence of the self-criticism that ensued, which also marked the history of the PT, was the rise of an internal “articulation” of the independent segments, with strong support from social movements, sectors of the churches and intellectuals. It had a more pragmatic orientation and began to take up a majority proportion of the party leadership. This was the beginning of rendering explicit internal *tendencies*,³ officially acknowledged

3 *Tendencies* are organizations that are usually formalized and disciplined within the PT, with an intense political life, through which theses are discussed, internal elections are waged, electoral campaigns are structured and patronage jobs are distributed and supervised. Most activists are rather faithful members of a tendency than of the PT.

in 1987, after debating for several years. These tendencies are even now the main reference for the militants (Gaglietti 2003), and function as a party within the party.

Some time later, in January 1985, a candidate who was an opponent of the military regime in the last indirect election for the President's Office was elected. This form of election confirmed the defeat of the *Direct Elections Now* movement, which had mobilized millions of persons to defend the direct vote for the Presidency of the country. The PT decided not to participate in the collegium and excluded three of its eight federal deputies, including the leader, because they had gone against the party guidelines. In this episode the PT showed that, as a party, it was still strongly attached to an ethics of conviction; it took the risk of contributing, indirectly, to electing the candidate of the military to the Presidency of Brazil, in order not to make a pact with the elites that led the political oppositions to close ranks around Tancredo Neves – who was then elected but died before being sworn into office. To the public the party continued to appear radical.

During the National Assembly to write the Constitution (“Constituinte”), which took place between 1987 and 1988, the PT had an outstanding performance on many committees and gathered support to include several of its political agendas, especially social rights, in the new Federal Constitution – at the price of tacitly accepting the formal game of bourgeois democracy. For the great majority of organized social movements in the country, this was the most receptive channel for their demands. The strategy followed by the movements was to ensure that there would be a broad ensemble of demands included as rights in the legal texts, in the expectation that they would later be fulfilled.

However, a significant part of the “conquests” was suppressed already during the second round of voting, when the more conservative sectors managed to achieve a more cohesive articulation. It was in this legislature that Lula had his only term in parliament. The performance in the “Constituinte” was damaged in the eyes of public opinion when at the end of the assembly, all of the PT caucus refused to sign the new Constitution. But, with this attitude, the party once again showed that it was faithful to its origins and did not accept the rules of the game, since they wanted the approval of issues such as

an audit of the foreign debt, the nationalization of banks and mineral wealth, urban and agrarian land reform.

During this period, between the “Constituinte” and the second round of presidential elections in December 1989, Brazil was facing the choice of the model of society that would be implemented, a radically democratic society with a guarantee of social rights of citizenship, with a sovereign national project, change in the structures producing inequality and poverty, or else an insertion subordinated to international capitalism, with a neoliberal profile and guided by the Washington Consensus, actually increasing the historical social inequality. Lula’s defeat and the election of Collor de Mello showed that the choice was in favor of the second alternative (Sobottka 2003).

Thus, the experiences of the PT in heading local governments already took place in a very different context from when the party was founded. The military regime had ended, a multiparty democracy was in place and unions and social movements had become strong social actors. Two much broader changes were taking place in this context: first, the Berlin Wall came down, and with it, part of the credibility of the Socialist alternative sought by the PT; secondly, the neoliberal movement, which, one decade earlier had reached power in Western European countries and in the United States, had now also become victorious in Latin American. Thus, new agendas began to take the central place in politics, such as stability, efficiency, good government, fiscal balance.

Participation and democracy: The *PT* way of governing

The first experiences of the PT in government at a local level were not good. In 1982, in the first election in which the PT participated, it won in Diadema, a city in the metropolitan area of São Paulo where it had a strong union base, and in a small town in Maranhão. Three years later, in a complementary election, it won the election in Fortaleza. The mayor in Maranhão soon changed to another political party, and the two other terms were marked by conflict around the influence of the party in the administration. As a result, the people elected ended up leaving the party.

In 1988, the PT won the dispute for the city administration in several medium-sized and large cities, including São Paulo and Porto Alegre. In some cities it had made alliances with other leftwing parties. For the first time it had been placed before the challenge of leaving the opposition to manage a number of major cities in Brazil. The city of São Paulo has the third largest budget in Brazil, losing only to the Federal Government and to the state of São Paulo itself. Now the PT had to find ways of applying to the everyday work of public management its proposal to invert the priorities of previous governments, of being different from other parties in dealing with the public weal, of ensuring the rights of those who were historically relegated to a secondary role, and to profoundly transform the current society.

In a few cases, the first initiatives were marked by very great voluntarism, and resulted in failures. This is clearly shown by public transport in Porto Alegre. The city administration intervened in the public transport companies with the express goal of lowering the price of tickets, alleging that the concessionaires were using the money on other companies. For most of the companies, the fate was expropriation. After managing the system for a long time, the city administration made an agreement with the owners, returned the companies to them and instituted programs for capitalization, fleet renewal and improvements of the service – at higher ticket prices than the original ones. The greatest mistake lay in the fact that the PT wanted to offer cheap transport by diminishing the profits of the capitalist owners, but the population demanded, above all, quality transport. Price was not such a serious issue, since the salaried workers' expenditures on transport are limited to 6% of their wages, the remainder being paid by the employers.

The PT has reacted to the situation as a whole by holding seminars, forums of discussion and training programs. The scarce experience in public management, the many dreams of a better society and above all the support the party had among intellectuals and professionals, resonated in these events. The result of these initiatives was a set of texts publicized as the *PT way of governing*. At the limit, as fondly hoped by some of its most optimistic formulators, this way of governing could even constitute the alternative form of transition to socialism through a democratic route. Emphasis, however, was on the binomial *inversion of priorities and participation of the peo-*

ple. With this the PT had decided to govern in a more inclusive way, but prioritizing the segments that had been neglected until this point, in agreement with what it understood to be the mission received in the polls, and strengthening the participation of the very low income population in the local government decisions. The document shows the party beginning the transition from its programmatic choice towards pragmatism seen as necessary to participate *responsibly* in the democratic institutions.

When describing this challenge to his fellow party members, the then secretary for institutional affairs, Jorge Bittar, admitted that in the past there had been a maximization of the objectives by the party when taking on claims of the social movements, such as the government running transport and the health system, the democratization of access to public education, the social use of urban land and the formation of people's councils (Bittar 1992). He thus acknowledged that considering the victories in the elections, the long-term party objectives – synthetically expressed in the goal of implementing socialism by the democratic route – required a political mediation that would render the public management of the municipality feasible within the concrete conditions of Brazilian reality. Seeking this mediation, the set of propositions defined as the *PT way of governing* arose, which in brief consists of the following points: (a) reinforcing the political culture of collective and individual rights instead of favor as legitimation of political power; (b) strengthening the local Legislature; (c) emphasizing ethics in the transforming policy and reintroducing morality in dealing with the public weal; (d) instituting the right to participation, combining representative democracy with participatory democracy (Bittar 1992).

This new municipal government program attempted to reconcile the theses publicly defended by the party with the daily needs of public management, without neglecting the permanent need to maintain, and if possible extend, its legitimacy in the eyes of the voters. The declared purpose was not only to manage well, it was also to reform the local form of the state structurally. In this sense, the same document lists the central traits of the intended reform: (a) participation of the people in order to guarantee that the government plan will be implemented and ensure a shift in the correlation of forces between “popular and dominant classes”; (b) to invert the government's pri-

orities, ensuring that investments will be channeled to areas considered most needy, recovering the quality of public service and guaranteeing equal access to basic services for all; (c) to de-privatize, democratize, and render the state public, combating clientelism and corruption; (d) to politicize the distribution of public funds; (e) to practice a policy of alliances which will ensure the political and social support of the government, involving even the municipal legislature (city council).

The PT chose to further the political decentralization in its own way, opening up public management to sectors that were previously relegated to apathy, to clientelistic cooperation, or to claims organized into social movements. It was thought that this participation could be easily solved through co-management with an adequate division of tasks, expressed as follows: "There are tasks that are the responsibility of social movements, such as creating autonomous spaces for organization and specific forms of institutionalization of their representations. The Executive is responsible for the government actions that are to democratize, to include the people's participation in the decision-making and planning process, promote and broaden the forms of consulting civil society" (Bittar 2002).

The expectation of the new governing authorities concerning co-management and decentralization was that the people's movement would gain strength to contribute as the factor that would be decisive concerning power, rendering the local government action governable and legitimate. This would thus allow it to put into practice policies turned towards population segments that had previously been relatively excluded from the public policies of the cities.

Party and social movements were suddenly faced with new roles and a new relationship between themselves. For the social movements and other bearers of the project of a new society, the time seemed to have come to take large steps towards the goal. In this partnership, however, there was an ambiguity: the opportunity of participation requires levels of formality and establishes as logical needs schedules and procedures that are typical of bureaucracy or the political game, which are not part of the daily life of movements and citizens who were previously not mobilized. Furthermore, it was spon-

sored by the public administration which theoretically should have been controlled by it.

The success and failure of the PT in local administration could be exemplified, respectively, by Porto Alegre and São Paulo. In the former the Participatory Budget (OP – Orçamento Participativo) was implemented and the party remained in power for 16 years. In São Paulo there were two PT administrations (Luiza Erundina 1989-1992, Marta Suplicy, 1999-2002) and both ended in great wear and tear. But generally the local management of the party, especially the OP, gained great political and academic recognition. Besides the large volume of publications, over 100 Brazilian cities adopted some form of participatory budget.

The Participatory Budget was stylized as the venue *par excellence* of decentralized participation and as the distinctive brand of the PT way of governing (Streck et al. 2005; Sobottka et al. 2005). On opening up part of the public budget to indications coming from the population, it created and broadened facets of democracy that had been previously unknown in Brazil (Santos 2002; Avritzer/Navarro 2003). The PT was very insistent on connecting the OP to the party, transforming it into electoral currency, and not allowing its formalization as a policy of State. With this they lost the opportunity of socializing, to all citizens, that which was, unarguably, its greatest innovation in local management. This affects mainly the social movements, since local policy is a privileged route to fulfill its demands – and they had demanded this participation in decisions on the budget.

The relationship between the PT and the social movements had been a strategic alliance – created and intended for the long-term. According to Fleury (1994), “democratization is assumed by these movements as being an indispensable condition to improve their living conditions, insofar as the instrument that can guarantee their capacity to exert pressure is their experience in organizing and participating.” But they do not have direct access to the central organs of power and public administration. That is why many of their leaders seek to personally join in building bridges between parties and movements. The PT was the main addressee of these efforts.

The transition of the PT from a class party, advocating a democratic route to socialism, to a party that was reasonably successful in several municipal

governments is closely linked to its connection with social movements and with its "non-traditional" way of doing politics in these initial years. Brazilian politics is considered as traditionally characterized by personalism and patrimonialism. The PT proposed to break with this tradition, creating a year-round political party and, in local management, encouraging the participation of citizens in decisions affecting their city, through their organizations. In the OP, for instance, in the first few years, belonging to movements or organizations came first and foremost.

However, within the PT, from the start there have been two positions in a dispute on their relationship with both classical and new social movements and civil society in general. On the one hand there is a vanguard conception that believes activists should occupy strategic positions and lead the groups ideologically. On the other, there is the conception that considers that the party should reflect the movements, in a two-way relationship: being at their service as a mediator in the different struggles and, at the same time, recruit party cadres and support among them. The relationship with the movements was conceived as based on base nuclei, probably an inheritance both from the Ecclesial Base Communities and from the socialist tradition of councils. In these nuclei, the militants of a neighborhood, a factory, or of some movements would come together as the basic unit of the party, in order to organize political action, opine on issues of party life, promote political education and suggest agendas for action. The internal democracy was strongly structured into a flow of discussions and deliberations that had these nuclei as a point of departure. Particularly in the first few years, this structure of nuclei enabled the recruitment and organization of a very large number of militants who compensated for the lack of other resources that could be mobilized for the party.

Right after the 1982 elections, however, a gradual but continuous substitution of the binomial of social movements-nuclei by *tendencias* could be perceived, as a structuring center of the PT base. In an in-house document discussed at the time (National Plan of Organization), it is said that whereas in the three previous years the number of affiliated members was multiplied by ten, the number of nuclei did not even double. According to the authors of the

document, “the party did not respond satisfactorily to the organization of the nuclei”. A little further on, the authors find:

We observed that the nuclei are maintained where they are linked to social movements, and where their members are motivated to participate in party life. There is a weak PT in places where the social movement is strong, but there is no strong PT where the social movements are weak. This, means, to say the least, that the PT continues to receive its strength from the social movements, but has not provoked their existence where they do not exist.

The more the party established itself as a *normal* party, with city councilors and deputies, mayors and even elected governors, the more the party machine grew (Cesar 2002; Novaes 1993; Samuels 1997). The logic of the internal disputes to conquer small sinecures grew in volume, and the tendencies became the structuring space of party life (Gaglietti 2003). For many militants it became necessary to choose between dedicating themselves to the movement or to the *tendency*, and the consequence was a greater distance between the life of the social movements and the daily life of the party base. In recent years, a secretariat has dealt with the relationship between the PT and the movements.

Despite its pragmatic program for local government, at the national level the PT, during the 1990s, still faced strong internal tensions between the more moderate and more radical sectors. In 1993 it still defined itself as a revolutionary and socialist party, and the next year it “denounced the control of means of production by the dominant classes” (PT, 1998). Whereas in 1997 it defended its socialist project as a democratic revolution, the next year it stated that capitalism and private property, are not able to assure the future of humankind, and demanded a radical land reform and the suspension of the payment of foreign debt, because it was the utmost expression of imperialism. Samuels (2004) sees the demand for democratization of the State, made by the PT, as a much more political than economic view of socialism.

In spite of the persistence of radical positions in the party, the daily life of PT administration at a local level was fully compatible with the rule of law, the rules of democracy and the electoral game. On the national level, also, it is possible to observe in Lula’s electoral campaigns, movements towards the

moderate center of the political spectrum. In 1994 there was still harsh criticism of the Real Plan conceived by Fernando Henrique Cardoso when he was still Minister of the Treasury. But already during the next presidential campaign socialism was no longer mentioned as a goal to be pursued. The PT itself, at an extraordinary National Meeting, established a distinction between the party program, still defending socialism, and the future electoral program of candidate Lula (PT 1998). These tenuous movements reached their high point during the preparations for the 2002 electoral campaign.

The presidential election

After three consecutive defeats, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva won the presidential elections at the end of 2002. What happened for the PT candidate to finally reach the top office in the nation? Many factors contributed to this victory, among which we will highlight here a few external and a few internal to the PT.

Both the Cardoso Administration and the model of neoliberal policy that he sought to implement had lost a significant part of their former charm in the eyes of a large part of the Brazilian voters. That administration, by means that were never adequately explained, had managed to get a constitutional amendment passed allowing re-election. Right at the beginning of the second term, in 1999, there was a crisis in foreign exchange and the devaluation of the local currency, shaking the stability of prices which had until then been considered the greatest achievement of that administration. This was followed by a crisis in the electric power supply, a sector that had just been privatized, a considerable growth of unemployment and an increased perception of insecurity. Thus, in the final period of the second term, the government was weakened, although President Cardoso still had good personal prestige. The official candidate, José Serra could not make his discourse presenting himself as the candidate of change sound credible (Figueiredo/Coutinho 2003).

Studies also show that, in Brazil, political marketing, especially on television, exerts great influence on the voters' choice of candidates. And Lula's PT employed Duda Mendonça, one of the most prestigious advertising people in Brazil, for his campaign. This professional had several times done the marketing campaign for Paulo Maluf, a conservative politician sponsored by

the military regime, who in one of the campaigns adopted as his motto, “he steals but gets things done”. Very early, Duda Mendonça began to create an image of Lula as a competent, non-radical negotiator, which became known as *Lula light*. In the words of Figueiredo and Coutinho (2003):

The political marketing strategy of the candidate found its solution by showing a conciliatory Lula, elegantly dressed and supported by a team of high-quality scholars and technical specialists. Lula, the candidate, showed himself prepared to continue the main lines of the economic policy and fulfill contracts made with foreign investors; he also showed that he would know how to be flexible and negotiate everything needed for the good of the country.

A decisive attitude to allay mistrust among the sectors that feared a break with the institutions if Lula were elected was the dissemination of the *Letter to the Brazilian People* three months before the election (Silva 2002). In this letter candidate Lula promised that he would not change the tripod of foreign currency stability, daring inflation goals and generation of primary surplus to service the debt. Thus, he was committing himself to maintaining Cardoso’s “neoliberal” policy, which had formerly been so abominated, and which, ironically, was losing credibility throughout the continent. Another important measure was abandoning the traditional policy of alliances, addressed specifically at the parties on the left of the electoral spectrum (Lacerda 2002). In a doubly significant gesture, the Minas Gerais entrepreneur José de Alencar of the Liberal Party was invited to run as Lula’s vice-presidential candidate. The displacement of the PT to the center of the political spectrum was rendered easier by the fact that the two large parties that traditionally occupied this space, the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB-Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro), and the Party of the Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB-Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira), the latter in office, had taken openly conservative positions in recent years.

The alliance with the PL was particularly controversial. It went against the whole tradition of PT alliances, always made in the field of the left, to approach a party that belongs to the adversary ideological field. PT candidates gave up running as a protest and, in regional party offices as in Minas Gerais

there was an intervention to impose the alliance. The process of defining this alliance is very revealing concerning the changes in the party.

The PT tradition had, until then, been to discuss, sometimes to exhaustion, the *theses* that were being disputed at all levels of the party (Lacerda 2002). Internal democracy during the discussions and mandatory obedience to the party decisions were part of a set of rules that had been very zealously fulfilled (Samuels 1997). At the 2nd PT Congress in 1999, the majority sector sought changes in the rules and bylaws that would soften this discipline. Although they had the necessary majority, the changes made were ultimately limited in scope (Leal 2005).

The Extraordinary Meeting of 2002 in preparation for the electoral campaign, however, gave a relatively open permission to the national party leadership, to build alliances that, among the opponents of the Cardoso government, could join forces in order to maximize the chances of an electoral victory for Lula. The National Leadership (*diretório*) used this “blank check” and decided, without any consultation to the rank and file, to establish an alliance with the Liberal Party, offering it the vice-presidential slot. This procedure led Leal (2005) to conclude that “instead of radical changes in the bylaws or deep structural transformations, it appears to be in daily politics – through decisions of the moment, guided by the dispute on the electoral market – that the PT slowly transforms itself”. But the attitude convinced the voters. Samuels (2004) concludes that “Lula and PT achieved victory because both moved to the center of the political spectrum, and voters regarded this shift as credible, accepting PT’s ‘deradicalization’”.

This attitude, and above all the fact that it was possible, can be seen as a further demonstration that the PT, which was always considered a strong party, in which the rank and file had broad control over the leadership, had changed its strategy from policy-seeking to vote-seeking. Samuels (2004), however, analyzes the internal structures of the party, especially that of the rank and file leaders’ relationship and the accountability that the latter should have to the former, and concludes that the “PT’s moderation was not simply a result of Lula moving to the center and dragging the party with him. Instead, the rank and file moderated and then chose to delegate additional autonomy

to Lula [...]. These increasingly pragmatic members could influence party decisions because of PT's internally democratic institutions".

When one then looks at the origins, asking what is happening with the social segments that gave birth to the PT, this thesis becomes more plausible.

The socially committed groups, especially those formerly connected to the Liberation Theology, became the minority in churches. Brazilian Catholicism became more conservative and charismatic, most of the Protestant churches lost their impulse to commitment and are involved mainly in theological themes, and Pentecostalism, which is growing fast, prioritizes traditional welfare work.

The social movements that had arisen there and recruited their leaders, took their own routes. At least since the 1992 Earth Summit, an emptying of the movements and a growth in the organizations formerly connected to them can be perceived (Sobottka 2003). From radical adversaries or advocacy movements, they became partners of the State and even with private companies in implementing public policies – at the price of accepting the rules imposed by the dispute for resources.

The unions are under the pressure of the worsening of conditions that resulted from the restructuring of production that radically changed the world of work in the last few decades. Although in Brazil, the number of unionized workers remains relatively stable, the sectors that were the first to create the PT, such as metallurgical workers and bank employees, became much smaller and to a large extent follow a political orientation that is close to other parties. Today the majority of the large unions that constitute the Central Workers' Union, close to the PT, is connected with education, together with smaller unions of government employees. Their priority is to fight to maintain the conquests of yore. They have dropped the combat against the established system, in order to seek greater, and possibly more advantageous inclusion in the existing system.

The classical left found it difficult to keep up their public discourse. A few successful local administrations, such as the Porto Alegre one, were led by members of these sectors. The fact that they were successful already reveals how their leaders became pragmatic political leaders, not to forget that a few more radically-oriented groups left the party. Among the independent

intellectuals, some ended up by committing themselves to the Cardoso government, and there sought to render their theses feasible, others remained committed to the PT project, but became disillusioned during the Lula administration. Only very few still remain as sympathizers or active members of the party.

During the election campaign, the PT emphasized hope and their adversaries tried to exploit fear. Dias and Perez (2006) define these two poles as follows: on the one hand “the hope of transforming the unjust Brazilian social landscape, interrupting the persistent vicious cycle of corruption in the State, recovering and furthering economic growth, in other words, profound transformations in the social, political and economic spheres of the country.” On the other, fear associated with the “loss of credibility of the country on the foreign market, the flight of capitals, the increment of the recessive and inflationary process which was already ongoing, in other words, all kinds of macroeconomic disorders that could be associated with a radical change in the economic policy of the country.”

And what won this clash was hope – at least, that is what Lula said, right in the beginning of his speech as President-Elect.

Already as he formed his government team, it became clear that Lula would seek to balance continuity and change. Continuity in the macroeconomy, admitted in the *Letter to the Brazilian People*, became clear with appointments such as that of the ex-President of BankBoston, Henrique Meirelles, as President of the Central Bank, of entrepreneur Luiz Fernando Furlan to the Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, and the fact that many specialists were kept in positions of trust to which they had been appointed by the previous government. The creation of the Zero Hunger (*Fome Zero*) program and the appointment of several historical leaders of the PT to areas of government considered social, indicated changes in these areas.

Continuity in economic policy was the most visible characteristic of everyday government life. A notorious exception is the foreign policy that combined faithfulness to its long tradition with initiatives to strengthen partners previously relegated to a secondary plan. (Vizentini, 2005). The social policy had a “turbulent learning period”, between ethical convictions and pragmatism (Dias/Perez 2006), without managing to set itself free from the guardi-

anship of the economic area. Thus, the Lula Administration is reaching its end and the statistics of the government themselves – of the Institute of Applied Research, IPEA (see www.ipea.gov.br) – have not been able to indicate consistent changes in the indicators of income distribution, health, schooling, or even land reform. The implementation of the budget by the ministries themselves, with expenditures well below the predicted level, shows neglect with regard to the ensemble of social policies in this administration.

The most dramatic example of continuity, however, occurred on the level of the relationship between the government and a traditionally corrupt parliamentary clientele, which became publicly known beginning in May 2005. The Brazilian electoral system, with dozens of political parties competing, as a rule places the governing authorities, at both the local and state and national level, in a minority situation in parliament, and they need to continue obtaining support in order to govern and get their priority policies approved. Lula, for instance, had less than 20% of the seats in parliament. The clientelistic practice established means that the person who governs often becomes a hostage and has to make many different concessions. The recent denunciations unveiled the practice of getting support not only by means of policies negotiated case by case, but also through the distribution of money for political parties and deputies, probably coming from overpriced contracts with State companies and government agencies.

There are two unknowns that cannot be answered here. First, despite investigations in parliament and public confessions by some of the people involved, the breadth of this practice, whose structure was inherited from the previous government, as well as details on the source of the money have not been clearly determined. Second, the opinion surveys published in the main press are not really conclusive about the impact of those accusations on the image of the PT, on its voters and the public at large. The October elections will probably provide a more consistent indication.

But the PT is using a lenient strategy in dealing with issues relating to ethics and the morality of the public weal, formerly considered a characteristic of its action. Thus it makes it difficult to keep up the support of middle sectors that joined their project for reasons of conviction. At the last National Meeting, in April 2006, for instance, the PT decided that it would only begin

to investigate these accusations after the elections – more than eighteen months after they were made public. This complacency with regard to corruption is in contrast, for instance, with the rapid punishment of deputies who, at the very beginning of the Lula Administration, remained faithful to the party program, voting against the orders of the leadership, and were expelled from the party within a few days. In this way, the PT is close to becoming today only the representative of segmented interests that gather within it, and is not able to represent those who dedicated themselves to creating and advocating new projects for society.

Thus, the PT, which in the first decade after it was founded tried to polarize politics in Brazil ideologically, which after taking up local administrations tried to bring together the maximization of votes and administrative efficiency with the legitimation of its project for democracy, now appears as a fully established party, following the rules of the game in what it formerly repudiated as bourgeois democracy and capitalism. How this change is perceived by historical militants further left in the party can be illustrated with the words of Francisco de Oliveira, in a recent interview (Estado de São Paulo, April 28, 2006), on the day the 13th National Meeting of the PT began, which was to prepare the agendas of the campaign to reelect Lula.

ESP: “What can one say then to the militants about the future of the party?”

Oliveira: “It has no future. The PT is going to continue to have a formidable machine, but the influence of the rank and file is no longer relevant. [...] It can continue as a political machine, but its character as a transformer has already been lost. This cannot be recovered.”

If Francisco de Oliveira is mistaken or not, will only be known with time. The fact is that, in Brazil, which a short while ago seemed to be looking at the rebirth of a utopia of a better world in connection with manifestations such as the World Social Forum, at present there are no social bearers of new utopias, able to cause an impact comparable to that caused by the PT when it was created and during its quarter century trajectory.

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